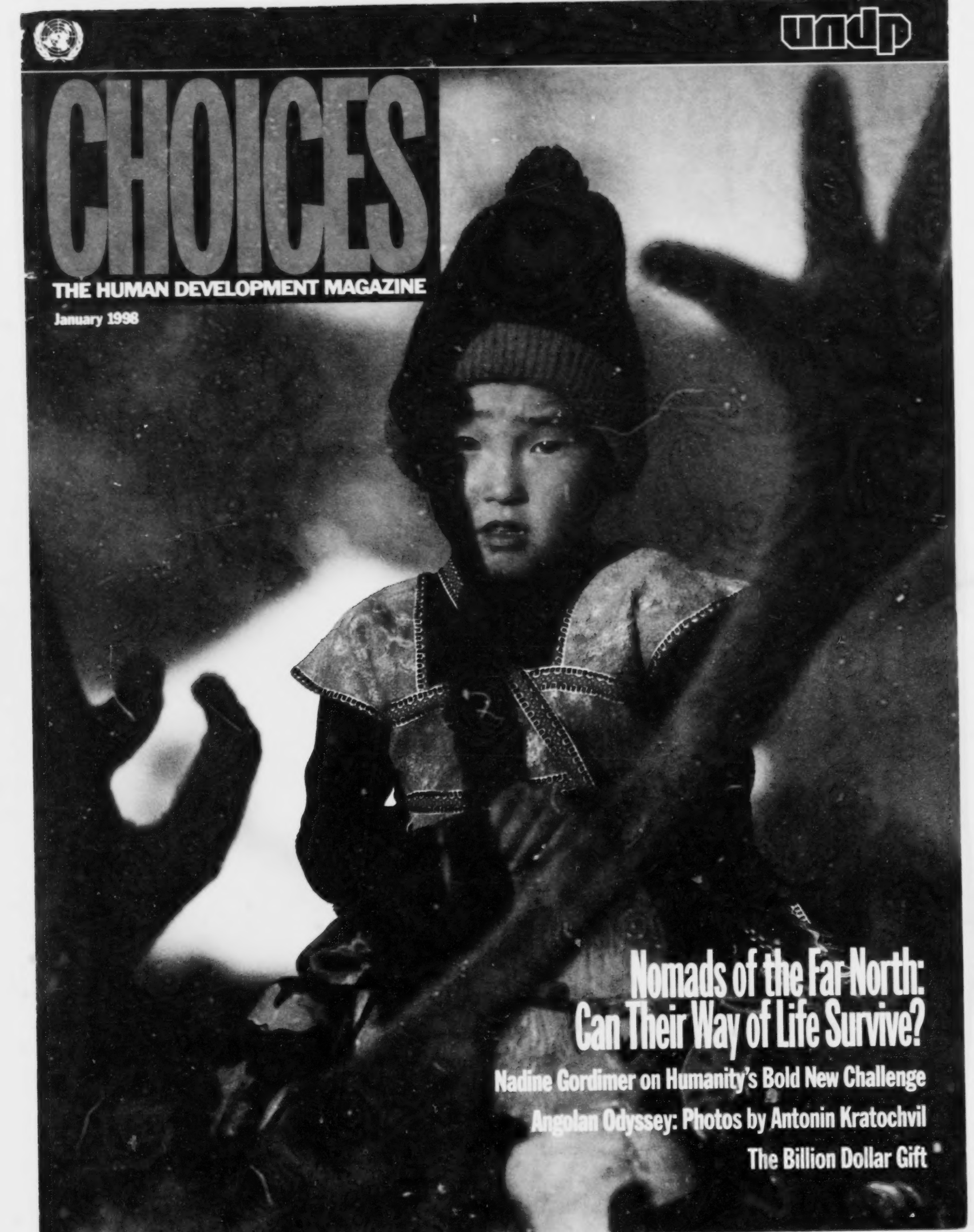

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CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

January 1998

Nomads of the Far North: Can Their Way of Life Survive?

Nadine Gordimer on Humanity's Bold New Challenge

Angolan Odyssey: Photos by Antonin Kratochvil

The Billion Dollar Gift

FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Dien Bien Phu, Viet Nam—The guns fell silent on Dien Bien Phu more than four decades ago in a battle that effectively ended French colonialism in Viet Nam. Today, the only sounds of combat are those heard through the crackling sound system in the Dien Bien Phu museum. Tiny red lights flash ominously across a mock battle field and mark an elaborate system of tunnels and trenches that the Viet Minh used to crush the French garrison.

These days, a different kind of battle is taking place in these lush green valleys: a quiet yet determined struggle among villagers to pull themselves out of poverty. Hoang Thi Mai, a 30-year-old mother of four, is among those who are winning the war.

Four years ago, distressed by a chronic lack of money and the poor health of her children, Ms. Mai made the bold decision to sell her only buffalo and try her hand at farming fish. All she had was courage, and trust that the development agency she put her faith in, and that offered her the know-how to get started, would not let her down. Her neighbours folded their arms and watched.

Over time, Ms. Mai's income grew. Within a year she had enough money to renovate her home, improve the family diet and buy a black-and-white television set. Today she is a trend-setter in her community: the neighbours that once viewed her as reckless are now following her example.

In UNDP, we call this "capacity-building": equipping people with the skills they need to help themselves and, in turn, to help others. As an old saying—slightly updated—goes, "teach a woman to fish, and she will provide food for her family for the rest of her life."

The outcome was a happy one for Ms. Mai. Indeed, she was one of four individuals who were honoured at the United Nations in October, in a special commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (see page 11). But as we are all too well aware,

Today Ms. Mai is a trend-setter in her community: the neighbours that once viewed her as reckless are now following her example.

even the most determined individuals can be held back in an environment that does not support them.

As the leader of a journalists tour to that country last September, I saw other aspects of capacity-building in Viet Nam that are equally important if the fight against poverty in that country is to succeed. I came to appreciate the complexities of liberalizing an economy that was staunchly communist for years, and introducing a modern justice system almost from scratch. These are just some of the areas in which UNDP is providing support, and which can help to create a climate in which individual enterprise and ingenuity—crucial to poverty eradication—can thrive.

Today, Hanoi has diplomatic relations with more than 160 countries. It has buried the hatchet with its old colonial masters and with the United States, which opened an embassy in Hanoi in July 1995. The same month, Viet Nam was admitted as the seventh member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which augurs well for its future. Mobile phones are part and parcel of the scene in Viet Nam, a sign that the insularity that once characterized the country has receded.

Viet Nam is a vibrant country—not a war—poised to face the 21st century. With the political will, and support from the international community, poverty, too, could become a dusty memory of times past.

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CHOICES
THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

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A publication of the United Nations Development Programme

To stay afloat in a competitive global economy, Jamaicans are tapping into their own creativity and learning to rely on each other.

ENTERPRISE JAMAICAN STYLE: FROM REGGAE TO REGALIA

By John Maxwell Hamilton

Middleton, Jamaica—Owen White is standing on the steep slope of his farm in the Blue and John Crow Mountains. He is also standing on the edge of an equally precarious global economy.

Cradling in his hands the beans from one of his coffee trees, White ruefully mentions a commercial bank that he has done business with. It is in the same fix as many other institutions that have become stressed since Jamaica opened its economy to foreign competition. It can't pay White the money it owes him from the sale of some of his crops.

His one-hectare farm is part of larger holdings that have belonged to his extended family for many years. It has potential for producing coffee, fruits and vegetables for local tourist and export markets. But this traditional arrangement leaves him without title to his land and thus no collateral for credit, a grave handicap if he is to make improvements and acquire better equipment.

Then, too, he must contend with the bumpy three-kilometre road that runs from his village to the highway. Trucks that leave with tomatoes, one of his neighbours wryly observes, arrive at markets with tomato sauce.

Realizing that he cannot solve these problems alone, White and more than 30 locals have formed a Farmers Development Society. With its increased clout and help from the Jamaica Promotions Corporation (JAMPRO), the society has developed a relationship with the nearby Strawberry Hill hotel. The members sell their coffee and fruit to the luxury mountain resort. This gives them a connection with Jamaica's tourist industry, the country's largest source of foreign exchange.

The global economy touches every product, even those that are not exported.

White, secretary of the society, describes their plans to build a small pickle-processing facility and a bakery that will produce special fruit breads using local produce. He himself has started to fashion bamboo fences around his coffee plants. This will allow him to use compost to fertilize the trees so that he can grow organic coffee, which commands a higher price among foreigners.

And thanks to help from JAMPRO, the Farmers Development Society is just this week celebrating the arrival of electricity. It has also secured funds from the Canadians for a water tank and money from the Norwegians for materials to repair the road, something the community does little-by-little on free days.

The Farmers Development Society in Middleton is just one of a dozen ongoing JAMPRO efforts to help small Jamaican entrepreneurs under a project funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

This is a novel approach to get small businesses in developing countries "out of isolation and into the global market," says Joyce Lin-Yueh Yu, UNDP's deputy resident representative in Jamaica. "It draws on European models where small enterprises are networked together to do common marketing, purchasing of raw materials, technology and bank loans."

The UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which oversees JAMPRO implementation of the US$1.1 million project, has launched similar "industrial cluster programmes," as it calls them, in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere.

Their common theme is that small may be beautiful—and highly entrepreneurial. But to secure a place in the world economy, small and medium-sized businesses need the muscle that comes from working together, even if only informally.

It is too early to pronounce any of the Jamaican initiatives a clear success. But they provide a window on the potentials and pitfalls of the global economy.

In recent years the Jamaican government has accepted the free-market arguments

that call for short-term pain in order to secure long-term economic gain. Tariffs, some of which were 150 per cent of the cost of an imported good in the late 1980s, have dropped steadily toward a goal of 20 to 30 per cent. Such adjustments, says the World Bank, which is pressing for such reforms, will benefit domestic consumers and encourage Jamaican businesses to become more competitive globally.

But more jobs, and the money to buy those cheaper products, have not materialized immediately. Inefficient companies vying with cheaper, higher-quality foreign goods have folded or laid off workers. The economy shrank 1.7 per cent in 1996 and official unemployment was 16 per cent (a figure that does not include underemployment). The 15.8 per cent inflation rate was better than the previous year's rate (25.5 per cent), but still high.

The result is that Jamaica is as exposed to the global economy as it is to the breezes that blow across the Caribbean. "There is no such thing as domestic production," says Patricia Francis, JAMPRO's lanky, frank president. The global economy touches every product, even those that are not exported, because products sold in domestic markets must compete with imports.

"We say 'You know how. Let's show you how to do it better.' "

This is where the JAMPRO project comes in. To make the country competitive, Francis says, the government must identify sectors, products and national cultural traits that give Jamaica an edge, and then must help them become players in the global economy.

Francis and other officials emphasize Jamaican creativity as one of those assets. This has led JAMPRO to support handicraft makers and to see competitive advantage in its music. "We have to use international recognition of reggae to launch our products," she says.

One Jamaican entrepreneur helped by JAMPRO has taken the idea literally.

For some years Vanessa Taylor Ltd. has operated a facility that sews T-shirts for a US-based company, Hanes. Recently it started a new plant near Montego Bay that is manufacturing its own colourful dresses, shirts, scarves and other garments under the label Reggae to Wear.

In the T-shirt sewing operation, says Gilles Stevens, UNIDO's country director, Jamaicans add as little as 18 cents to the value of a product. But when the entire production is located inside the country, as with Reggae to Wear clothes, Jamaicans can add $9 to $15 of value.

In line with the networking idea in the JAMPRO project, Reggae to Wear has begun to establish business relationships throughout the country. In addition to employing more than 50 workers inside the factory, the company gives consignment work to women in the community. A typical group of them can be found not far away from the factory in Clover Robinson's front yard. Working on benches and chairs under a broad tree, they put fringe on Reggae to Wear sarongs, talk, and keep an eye on their young children.

Sorina Wehbe, who manages the Vanessa Taylor factory, personifies the global economy. A Lebanese born in Australia, she has worked in Thailand, Canada and Jamaica. Excited about the

Women in the community are employed as consignment workers for Reggae to Wear.

potential of the plant, she talks about capturing the Jamaican creative spirit. She wants to hire locals to sew fabric scraps into dolls. She has already found a local company to make swim suits that will be sold under the company's musical sounding brand name.

When Wehbe mentions that she is looking for someone who can make belt buckles out of coconuts, a JAMPRO official suggests that she contact Mark Lindsay. Lindsay, who happens to live nearby, makes coconut containers for candles used by Starfish Oils, a Kingston-based company that JAMPRO is also helping.

Vanessa Taylor Ltd. relies on JAMPRO's Productivity Centre in Kingston for help in exploring foreign markets and designing new products. The centre has computer data bases full of Jamaican-style designs. The computers can also produce sewing patterns quickly. Companies pay small fees to use the services.

Such resource centres and the networks built around enterprises like Vanessa Taylor offer a Jamaican approach to solving Jamaican problems, says Valerie Viera, JAMPRO's forceful assistant vice president. JAMPRO, she says, does not bring in "foreign experts who say 'you don't know how.' We say 'You know how. Let's show you how to do it better.'"

Behind this upbeat, can-do spirit lies an unpleasant reality. Small entrepreneurs, even more than large ones, must continually look over their shoulders to see who is trying to overtake them.

Anyone who doubts that need only look around Vanessa Taylor's Reggae to Wear plant. Some workers practise drawing fancy designs with hot wax. Others bend over intently to colour them in with dyes.

This batik process originates in Indonesia, and the Jamaicans are practising it under the watchful eye of two talented Balinese artists who have come for six months as consultants. Taylor initially imported print fabric from Indonesia. Now she wants to make her own here in Montego Bay.

"Our goal is to stop importing processed goods six weeks from now," says Wehbe.

This borrowing process benefits Jamaica. But it is a two-way street. JAMPRO's president, Patricia Francis, notes that Africans, Indians, Japanese and Koreans now sing and market Reggae music.

"We have a long history of working with products that are knocked off," says Laurence Chang of the island's vulnerability. Chang is a Jamaican designer who has started a crafts company called Xaymaca, which relies on a vast array of artisans.

Jamaica originated a distinctive hamper basket woven from the fibrous inner bark of the hook tree. The Philippines and China, which have lower labour costs, copied the design and now sell it more cheaply.

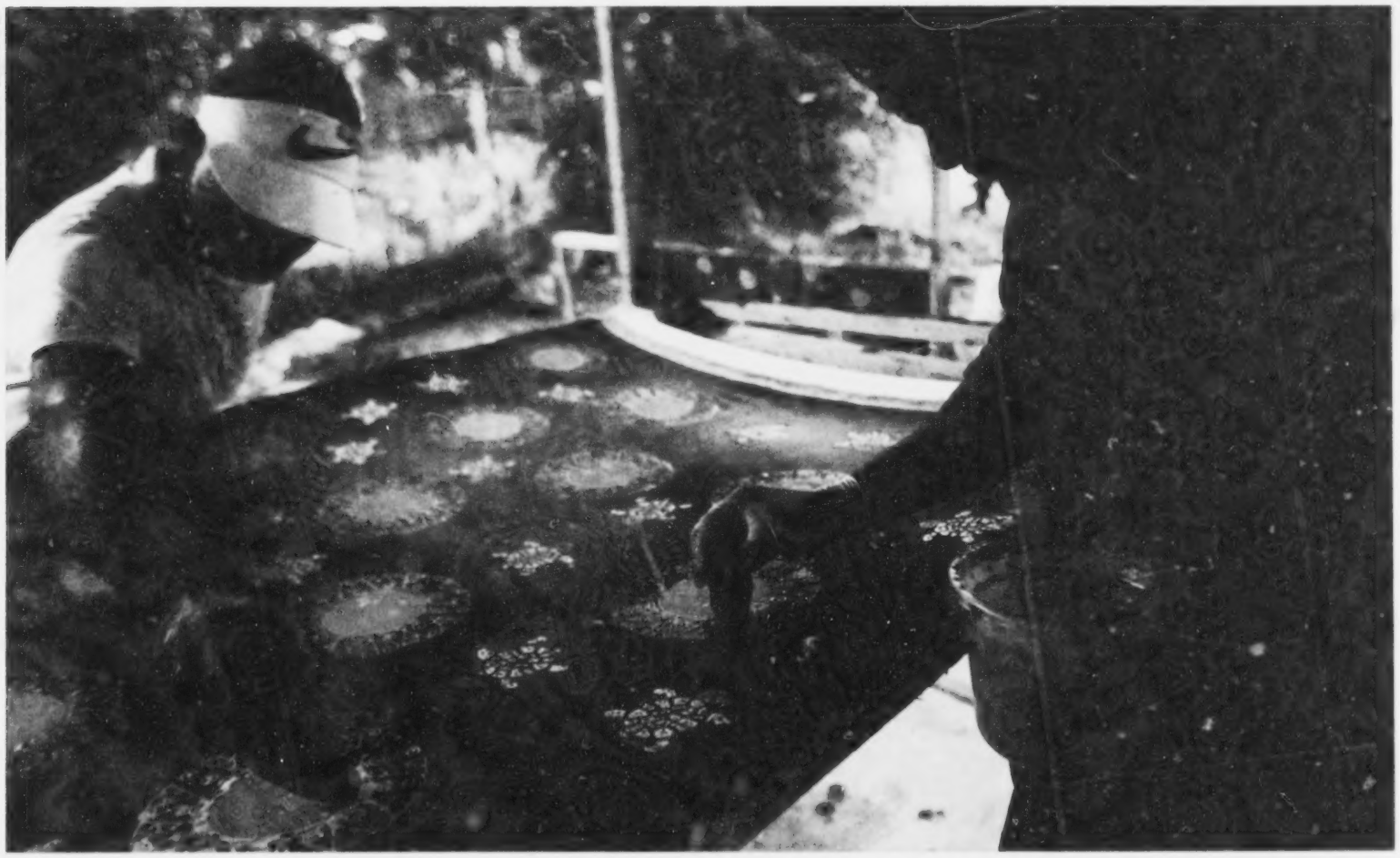
The trick to continued economic success, he says, is to stay one step ahead of the competition. Ideas for doing that clutter his office.

On one table are three bottles of honey. He hopes to develop a system for grading Jamaican honey and then exporting it. Jamaica is an Eden of fruits, and he wants to encourage local beekeepers to develop varieties based on different fruit nectars.

Other tables hold samples of bamboo tableware, which local artisans have created for Chang. The problems Chang has to overcome are that bamboo cracks easily and at least initially imparts a bamboo taste to liquid.

He locates a copy of a brochure for an upcoming gift products show being organized by Mexico. Everywhere, he says, Jamaica has competitors. "I know that this is something you can't stop. So you just have to take a positive attitude."

Jamaicans are producing their own batik fabrics rather than importing them from Indonesia.



Fabric scraps are made into dolls in this small enterprise in St. Thomas.

The fundamental goal of the JAMPRO project, says UNIDO's Gilles Stevens, is to instill an entrepreneurial attitude in Jamaicans.

Some like Chang seem to come by it naturally. Others, at all levels of society, will only learn over time.

Thanks to a local vocational school, a community near Black River on the south coast has become a centre for a group of energetic carpenters. One of them, Barrington Wright, works with no equipment of his own. Instead he rides his bicycle to others' workshops. They lend him tools for a small fee.

This, says Harold Davis, a JAMPRO staffer, is an unusual example of community cooperation. But, he laments, the carpenters won't take the next profitable step. Were they to create a formal cooperative alliance, they could buy raw materials more cheaply and market their products more effectively outside the community.

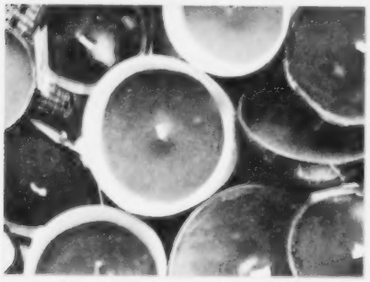
The reason they don't, Davis says, is that Jamaicans have a tradition of working independently. It takes a long time to build group trust.

Sharon McConnell, who started Starfish Oils in Kingston, has the entrepreneurial spirit. But she has to learn marketing skills and teach her workers to produce consistently high-quality scented candles and soaps. On this afternoon she is smarting from a client's irate call. A shipment of Starfish Oils candles in bamboo containers arrived in the United States riddled with holes. The termite-like chi-chi bug had been in the wood.

McConnell must also cope with a government bureaucracy that is often more focused on red tape than on helping eager business people get on with commerce. McConnell had to shut down her company for several months when a government agency made it difficult for her to import scents used in candles.

Chang complains that the government views crafts production as make-work welfare rather than enterprise with great economic potential. It would help, he says, if the industrial-development bureaucracy had responsibility for supporting crafts, rather than leaving it to the ministry of culture, which does not have an economic orientation.

How well Jamaica will fare in the global economy remains a question mark.



How well Jamaica will fare in the global economy remains a question mark. Individuals like Mark Lindsay, who supplies McConnell with coconut containers for her candles, has the potential to build a decent business for himself and his family. He has plans for a small factory that will employ four or five people and give him greater production. And, he says, he has the pleasure of working artistically.

But scented candles are not central to the world economy the way oil or steel is. And Lindsay will not do well if McConnell and others like her cannot effectively market the products he makes.

"We are young and fresh," says McConnell, whose business is currently breaking even. "We're fighting." ■

John Maxwell Hamilton, dean of the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University, has covered news in more than 30 countries. He is a commentator on public radio's MarketPlace. His books include Entangling Alliances: How the Third World Shapes Our Lives.

POVERTY

In the following essay, the winner of the 1991 Nobel Prize in literature challenges the notion that poverty is inevitable. She wrote the statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October.

The poor are always with us.

The eradication of poverty.

These are the poles of perception between which we stand today. These are the oppositions of the phenomenon of want.

The poor are always with us.

The first is ancient, an implied acceptance of a destined lot, everyone conditioned by class (each in his place); by religion (the meek shall inherit the earth), to be content to have no place and inherit nothing.

The eradication of poverty.

The second proposition refuses to accept poverty as part of human destiny. The United Nations General Assembly's designation of the UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty is a mission statement in the true sense. It is surely the boldest expression of faith in human endeavour ever made. It comes from the most representative body in the world. It posits perhaps the greatest human advancement ever embarked upon, an adventure greater than any attempted in the progress of humankind since we could define ourselves as such. And most important, it asserts convincing proof that the goal could be attainable.

I do not propose to cite the statistics of the world of want: the staggering material facts of race, racial prejudice, political and social administration, geography, gender, ethnicity, agricultural practice, technological practice, industrial production, health services—everything, from the drying up of a stream to the closing down of an arms factory—that produce the phenomena of poverty as lived by the world's 1.3 billion poor.

When confronted with this evidence of physical, mental and spiritual deprivation, you can reach only one conclusion: poverty is a trap. Brought about by many factors, poverty is the nadir of disempowerment.

It is a disempowerment that has existed and does exist in democracies as well as dictatorships, links them, in a way we are reluctant to have to admit. The ballot box of free and fair elections has failed to empower the poor in most of the democratic countries. The dictatorship of the people failed to do so in most countries of the Soviet empire. And since the fall of communism, the West's claim of freeing those countries to the establishment of a market economy and prosperity means nothing to the old people who now beg in the streets of Moscow, as the homeless do in the streets of cities of the only great power left in the world, the United States of America. In Brazil, in Argentina, in Africa, in India, in Bangladesh, where in this world except for the small welfare states of the North, are there not people in the nadir of poverty? No need to enter into ideological differences, no need to make any value judgements: each country has produced—or failed to end—the shameful human end-product, poverty.

The new century is not going to be new at all if we offer only charity, that palliative to satisfy the conscience and keep the same old system of haves and have-nots quietly contained.

What is a decade, in terms of centuries of acceptance, that *the poor are always with us?*

Our answer surely is that the world now has the knowledge, the scientific and technological ability to do away with most of the causes of poverty, and to turn around the consequences of causes it cannot prevent. There are identified practical means: what is needed is the money and commitment of governments, regional, national, and bodies of world governance, to cooperate and carry out these means. And what is needed to bring this about is a roused awareness and admittance among the peoples of the world that the new century is not going to be a new century *at all* in terms of the progress of humanity if we take along with us acceptance of the shameful shackles of the past—over a billion men, women and children in poverty, 82 countries unable to produce or buy sufficient food for their population—and offer only charity, that palliative to satisfy the conscience and keep the same old system of haves and have-nots quietly contained.

In prehistory early humans lived by what we would call now a subsistence economy: you hunted, you gathered, and when these resources of your group ran out in one place, you moved on; only nature discriminated, making one area more salubrious than another, but there was space enough to make of this an advantage rather than a deprivation. It was with the arrival of "surplus value" that the phenomenon of rich and poor began: with the cultivation of the valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile, when food was grown and could be stored instead of foraged and hunted, able to satisfy only short-term needs. As soon as there was more than sufficient unto the day, those who grew more than they could eat became the haves, while those whose harvest provided no surplus became the have-nots.

IN THE NEXT CENTURY: TO HAVE OR HAVE NOT

By Nadine Gordimer

Basically, nothing has changed since then. Except that it is no longer possible for societies to move on from one disadvantaged environment to a more salubrious one—the colonial era of the European powers was perhaps the last such movement to take place successfully, the final enactment of an obsolete solution to social problems. On an individual scale, immigrants in contemporary days generally find themselves received by locals with resentment as competitors in the labour market of the country of their aspirations, and quickly sink to a place among the poor of that country. Nothing much has changed over the centuries except that we have evolved what might be called a philosophy of acceptance of poverty.

For the rich, any contingency that they themselves might sink into poverty is so remote that it need not enter their minds. They are also in the position of being bountiful; so that, curiously, while they may be genuinely concerned about the existence of the poor, poverty is also a source of self-esteem. Without the philanthropy of wealth, the manner in which the world has dealt with, alleviated, poverty up till now could not have been maintained at all. But this over-spill of wealth is too sporadic, too personally dependent on what aspects of poverty, piece-meal, donors happen to favour, to be a solution.

I read recently that if an amount equal to the combined wealth of the ten richest individuals in the world could be made available annually, the problem of the world's 1.3 billion living in extreme poverty could be solved by the end of the century. But one cannot expect these individuals to give up their worldly goods *in toto* for the world, any more than most people are prepared to sacrifice their privileges entirely for those who have none. What is asked is for those who possess and control great wealth to look at the political and economic structures in their countries which have made that wealth possible and yet have created conditions that make philanthropy necessary—political and economic regimes that have failed to establish the means, inadequate pay for work, in education and training, in environment, by which people may provide for themselves in self-respect and dignity.

The wealthy and powerful who control the consortiums and international companies, and the government agencies who plan with them, need to take responsible heed of the emphasis placed by the UNDP on "putting people at the centre of development"; on the concept of development enterprises as not only or even primarily advancing the credit balance of a country and providing *x* number of jobs, but as the instigation of a series of social consequences that will affect the implicated community in many ways. What may put pay in the pockets of the income poor this year may be off-set, over their lifetime, by destroying their environment. Development becomes a dangerous form of social engineering if it discounts the long-term effects on social cohesion. Profit and loss, in the book-keeping of the eradication of poverty, will be a calculation of how many people's daily lives can be entered, in the *long-term*, on the credit column.

For the broad middle class, which includes the skilled working class in many countries, the possibility of descending to poverty is subliminally present. Their concept of poverty is tinged by fear, as well as by concern for those who suffer it: *there but for the grace of God go I*. Civil conflict, a change of government, inflation, a form of affirmative action whether on principle of colour, race or simply replacement of older employees with the young—these contingencies threaten middle class safety with its home ownership, its insurance policies and pension funds. All the things that poverty strips one of; all the safety-nets the poor do not have.... Poverty is regarded as a blow of fate that just might come. Alternatively, in defensive rationalization, whose fault is poverty, aside from national aleatory conditions? Perhaps, since the middle class by and large is industrious and ambitious—and has the possibility of advancement in terms of money and status, having a base to start from which the poor have not—the middle class often feels that it is lack of will, initiative and commitment to work as they themselves do, that keeps the poor in that state.

The basic image of poverty is the man begging in the street; the conclusion: surely there's *something else* he could do. Unemployment is suspect as lack of ability; and well it may be in many developing countries where lack of skills makes people literally unemployable, unable to be active in sectors where employment would be available. But what has to be realized is how that lack comes about in the general disempowerment of poverty itself. To abolish the spectre of the man begging in the street, the woman huddled on her park bench home, the children staring from a refugee camp, is first to make the effort to understand what factors create this disempowerment.

How do victims themselves perceive their poverty?

They live it; they know it best, beyond all outside concepts.

What, apart from the survival needs of food and shelter do *they* feel they are most deprived of? Researchers moving among

The world now has the knowledge, the scientific and technical ability to do away with most of the causes of poverty.

them have learned much that is often ignored, such as the perception of women that, as those who with their children suffer most, attention to their advancement should take more than a marginal "special interest" place in transformation of the lives of the disadvantaged in general. Recent advice to the Hong Kong meeting of the World Bank and the IMF was that some 15,000 bankers, finance ministers and representatives of development business attending "might do well to rededicate themselves to slowing population growth through more attention to reproductive health, education for girls and employment for women." Consultation on how communities in poverty see themselves in relation to the ordinary fullness of life other communities take for granted is now recognized by research as integral to harnessing the negatives of social resentment and passivity into vital partnership for change. It is the fortunate world outside dollar-a-day subsistence that needs to begin to see the impoverished as our necessary p. tners in world survival, partners to be listened to in respect of the components of what a decent life is. It is the privileged world that needs to come to the realization that a "decent life" cannot be truly lived by any of us while one-quarter of the developing world's population exists in poverty.

If economic poverty began when some had surplus production and some did not, and nothing much has changed in principle, the second cause of poverty as a phenomenon of human history is war, and nothing much has changed there, either. Wars, social conflict, whether at international, national, or inter-ethnic level, still produce hunger and homelessness, the prime characteristics of poverty, and now, it seems, on a rolling action scale, spreading as a deadly pandemic from one territory to another. The eradication of poverty implies a hand-in-hand relation with agencies of the non-violent resolution of conflict. The peacekeeping, peace-promoting work of United Nations and other formations, fraught with difficulty, danger and frustration, and controversial as it is, must be seen as a vital component of the Decade's aim. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, has put the truth succinctly: "Without peace, development is not possible; without development, peace is not possible."

The violence of nature—flood, drought and earthquake—is another factor that has caused poverty since ancient times,

It is the fortunate world that needs to begin to see the impoverished as our partners in world survival, partners to be listened to.

and that is something which is not within human capability to prevent, as wars are. But the violence perpetrated by humankind on nature is increasingly one of the causes of poverty. The destruction of indigenous forests, the pollution of oceans, the leaching out of the land by indiscriminate use of chemicals; these take away from communities their livelihood. The leakage of nuclear waste makes water unpotable and, as the people of Southeast Asia have so recently experienced, the hellish miasma from burned-out trees makes the very air unbreathable. The problem of poverty cannot be solved while the earth and its oceans that feed us are abused by ruthless government planning and blinkered human greed.

What are the moral perceptions of poverty?

These are governed by those looking on, looking in, so to speak, from the outside. "Poor but honest": consider the dictum. Why do the rich never make the qualification, "Rich but honest?" No one has commented on moral attitudes in this context better than the German poet and playwright, Bertolt Brecht. Here is his poem:

Food is the first thing. Morals follow on.
So first make sure that those who now
are starving
Get proper helpings when we do
the carving.

Is for people to be honest when they are starving our measure of virtue, or is it a measure of our hypocrisy? Common crime, up to a certain level—economic white collar crime is the prerogative of the wealthy—is a product of poverty and cannot be countered by punitive methods alone. Some of the funds that citizens, living in urban fear of muggings and robberies, want to see used, as the saying goes, to "stamp out crime" with more police and bigger prisons, would have better effect diverted to the aim of stamping out poverty. No one will be safe while punishment and pious moral dicta are handed out in place of food. The campaign against poverty is the best campaign against crime.

Finally, the definition of poverty does not end with material needs; the aim of its eradication will not be complete or perhaps even attainable without the world's attention to the deprivation of the mind: intellectual poverty. As food is the basic need for the starved body, literacy is the basic need of the starved mind. According to the *Human Development Report*, in the past 50 years adult illiteracy in the world has been reduced to less than 25 per cent. If it can be virtually ended by early next century, it will be a great force in the six-point global action plan provided by the report, and not only because the ability to read and write is crucial to participation in development, the "open sesame" to the world of work, mental skills and self-administration that is economic freedom. For to be illiterate or semi-literate is to be deprived of the illumination and pleasure of reading, of each individual's rightful share in an exploration of the world of ideas; it is to spend one's life imprisoned between the walls of one-dimensional experience.

Illiteracy cruelly stunts the human spirit both as a cause and result of the disempowerment we now dedicate a Decade to bring to an end.

I close with what I believe can be our text—for the day and the Decade—from the English poet William Blake:

Many conversed on these things as they
labour'd at the furrow
Saying: "It is better to prevent misery than
to release from misery:
It is better to prevent error than to forgive
the criminal.
Labour well the Minute Particulars,
attend to the Littleones,
And those who are in misery cannot
remain so long
If we do but our duty: labour well the
teeming Earth." ■

A WORLD WITHOUT POVERTY?

United Nations, New York—The evening glittered with rock stars, beauty queens, Hollywood actors and fixtures of high society. On Friday, 17 October, the United Nations opened its well-guarded doors and art-studded hallways to what can be described as a cross between a benefit gala—without the food, fundraising or champagne—and a diplomat's version of a political rally. It was the United Nations Development Programme's commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and the culmination of a year-long campaign to draw attention to the scourge of rich and poor countries alike.

Not only did the powerful and famous attend. Hoang Thi Mai, who looked somewhat dazed by the crowds and the lights, had travelled here from a remote village in Viet Nam where she farms fish. Mai and three others—Patricia Matolengwe, a community leader from South Africa, Joaquin Rodriguez, a tree farmer from El Salvador, and Lynette Cameron, a self-taught caterer from New York City—were presented with awards by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for "lifting themselves out of poverty."

Their stories made one believe that people *can* overcome the global and other forces at work to preserve the status quo—if given the right kind of support. Challenging the statement that "the poor are always with us" was South African writer and anti-apartheid crusader Nadine Gordimer. But apart from the broad policy changes proposed by UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth, in an official statement for the day, a call to action—beyond the gritty determination of the poor themselves—was absent. Attendees may have raised their awareness about poverty, but it was unclear just how they could take part in the challenge.

The evening ended on a reflective note in New York. But the activism of more than 100 UNDP offices around the world more than compensated for it.

In Lithuania, an evening basketball competition was launched to keep kids off the street and reduce juvenile crime. In Colombia, the proceeds of a performance by the National Theatre were donated to assist displaced women. In Mongolia, a three-day market was organized for handicraft producers who have benefited from small loans.

Others chose to target their efforts at government policy. Benin, Chile, Georgia, Nicaragua and Togo, among other countries, used the occasion to unveil national "Human Development Reports," documenting the nature and causes of poverty in their own societies. Morocco launched a national action plan against poverty. In Scandinavia, UNDP officials opened a series of public debates on the pernicious effects of corruption on the poor.

"All of you have come here this evening because you recognize that poverty cannot be allowed to spread without catastrophic consequences for rich and poor countries alike," said Mr. Annan to an audience of more than 1,000 people packed into the Economic and Social Council chamber of the UN, and via a giant television screen to a spillover crowd in the auditorium next door.

"You have come here because you share my hope that poverty can be conquered," he said.

His words carried the seeds of what could be the most momentous social revolution of our time.

If only enough people find ways to embrace it. ■

—Lois Jensen

Top to bottom, left to right: Kofi Annan and Patricia Matolengwe; James Gustave Speth and Joaquin Rodriguez; Nadine Gordimer; Dick Gregory; Jonathan Butler; Nane Annan; Danny Glover; Alhaji Papa Susso.

COMMENTARY

JAMES GUSTAVE SPETH

THE GIFT

Ted Turner's US$1 billion contribution to the United Nations is a godsend.

Beyond the tangible benefits it will bring to the world's poor and dispossessed, the gift comes at a time when UN resources for refugees and human development are shrinking, even though the needs and opportunities are growing. It is thus a wake-up call to those governments that, citing domestic priorities, are slashing their development and humanitarian assistance. It may even nudge governments that now owe the United Nations some $2.5 billion (including more than $1 billion owed by the United States) to pay their debts.

Did Mr. Turner make a sound investment in focusing his generosity on the United Nations? The answer, I believe, is clearly "yes." And his extraordinary gift calls attention to a part of the United Nations that works well and that is essential to the rest.

Throughout the cold war, when the Security Council was often deadlocked, another United Nations emerged and flourished—a United Nations engaged with refugees and the internally displaced, with the poor and hungry, with child survival and advancement of women, with population and environmental initiatives, with food security and with programmes to strengthen democratic governance. Indeed, most of the United Nations' financial resources and most of its personnel are dedicated to assisting the poor.

For millions in the poorest countries, the United Nations is not merely an international forum but the bearer of tangible benefits. The blue flag has the respect it does because it is the symbol of people helping other people build a just and sustainable world.

In its work in these areas, the United Nations brings special strengths.

■ The UN's programmes focus heavily on the neediest countries, and on the neediest people within those countries. For example, 90 per cent of our programme funds in the United Nations Development Programme are allocated to some 67 countries that are home to 90 per cent of the world's poorest people.

■ The neutrality of the United Nations means that it does not represent any particular national or commercial interest, or interests of "donors" generally. It can therefore develop special relationships of trust with countries and their people, and provide long-term capacity-building assistance free of short-term political or economic objectives.

■ While bilateral aid programmes are cutting back, the UN's universal presence means that it does not overlook any country. Through its unmatched network around the world, it emphasizes bottom-up, country-driven programming of assistance, with heavy involvement of community-based organizations and the poor themselves.

■ The United Nations has a special capability to coordinate humanitarian assistance and to link it to reconstruction in post-emergency situations, including the clearance of landmines. The breadth of the UN's work is unique. It can link work in peace building, in care for refugees, and in relief, reconstruction and development, and it provides an ideal base of support for early warning and preventive development initiatives.

Ted Turner has set an example for short-sighted donor governments and for the world's 450 billionaires.

The great goals for which the international community has worked—peace, democratization and human rights, an end to poverty and hunger, environmental protection, population stabilization, the control of drugs and terrorism—can be achieved only in the context of sustainable, people-centred development. The United Nations has a track record second to none in promoting that kind of development.

Also, powerful ethical and political considerations underscore why the United Nations must keep a balance between its peacekeeping and international security activities on the one hand, and its activities to promote human betterment on the other. The moral authority of the United Nations is built in large part on real service to real people, and this moral authority is fundamental to its success in peace building and elsewhere.

The United Nations is based on the principle that it should reflect the widely-shared priorities of nationals. The priority of most countries and most people is development. If that priority is not respected, the political compact that holds the world organization together is likely to crumble. If we want a United Nations for peace, we need a United Nations for human development.

In recognizing the importance of these relationships, as well as of the United Nations' capacity to turn money into genuine help for the world's neediest, Ted Turner has set an example not only for increasingly short-sighted donor governments but also for the world's 450 billionaires, whose collective assets exceed the annual incomes of half the world's people.

As important as the gift itself is Mr. Turner's commitment to press the United Nations' case with others, both individuals and corporations, who can join with him in securing a better world and a better United Nations. ■

James Gustave Speth is the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

Throughout the developing world, radical shifts are taking place: from war to peace, from one-party dictatorships to multi-party democracies, from the constraints and comforts of centralized economies to the challenges of competing in a global marketplace. While many of these changes are positive, they nevertheless require major readjustments in people's lives.

In a UNDP-sponsored "travelling seminar" last September, journalists saw how development assistance is easing transition in four countries facing very different circumstances. The first in a two-part series looks at how people are coping with the prospects of peace in Angola, and with the demands of a free market in the remote reaches of Russia's Far North.

Above: Russia's Evenу are seeking to balance a traditional way of life with new political and economic realities.

ON SHIFTING GROUND

ESSAYS FROM RUSSIA & ANGOLA

ON SHIFTING GROUND

RUSSIA

Northeastern Siberia, a land of high mountains, icy tundra and coniferous forests, is home to the Eveny.

Velvet-antlered reindeer are tethered outside the nomads' tents, trampling whitish moss underfoot as they watch the moon rise. There's snow in the air. The September temperature is well below freezing in the austerely beautiful hills of the Russian Far North. And when the old men of the Even people go to sleep in the reindeer-herding uplands, they say they listen to the earth below them snoring.

If you ignore the signs of poverty—the much-patched canvas of the encampments, the cheap clothes in artificial fiber on the herdsmen's backs—it's an idyllic picture.

"To a stranger, our life may seem savage and primitive," said 39-year-old Innokenty Burtsev, the head of a four-family travelling group whose camp is pitched above a fooming stream. "But to us, it's just life. The life our fathers led before us, what's in our blood."

Soviet bosses never quite worked out how best to get the 17,000 Eveny to serve communism. For ideological reasons, they "civilized" some into villages; but, for economic reasons, they kept others on the range herding reindeer. Now that the Eveny have been cut loose from that past by the new Russian market economy, they are trying their own solution: using their traditions to live in a way that will let capitalism serve them.

Innokenty's herders hope their expertise can earn them money by packaging reindeer products and marketing them in Russia and abroad, mainly in Asia. His people's dream is to set up a small, profitable industry—not relying too much on the government of the Sakha Republic, a region in northeast Russia, or on inefficient Moscow, seven time zones west.

Russian reindeer herders draw inspiration from foreign indigenous peoples of the North whom they have met at conferences or seen on television—the Canadians and Norwegians who lead a modified version of their traditional life, but with hot showers and phones of their own, and a proper income.

"That's how it should be done," sighed Innokenty's wife, Lyuda Burtsev, describing the sights she had seen at a 1995 conference of indigenous peoples in Moscow. "Just imagine. Hot showers every day would be paradise."

The life that the Even herders live now is Spartan. The Burtsevs migrate six times a year, moving with Herd Number Two from winter woods up to their summer pastures above the valley settlement of Sebyan-Kyuyel'. The "family brigade," which includes the Burtsevs, Innokenty's mother, her sister, and his father's sister, is waiting for the reindeer-mating season to end in October before packing its tents again.

In the fuggy warmth of her one-metre-square tent, Lyuda stirs a cauldron of reindeer innards bubbling on a square stove the size of a cookie tin. A crooked pipe of can-sized segments leads out through a hole in the canvas. There are two low beds on a layer of brushwood, where visiting neighbours sit.

Lyuda is a lively 33-year-old veterinarian who fell in love with Innokenty and married during a year of fieldwork as she finished vet school. She has been on the move for ten years with the herd and has three children.

Officially, she works as a vet in the summer and as cook for bachelor herders in the winter. The reality is harder: a dawn-to-dusk year-round coexistence with the herd, milking, cooking, stitching wounds, watching out for wolves, packing tents, gathering berries, making cream and washing the children's traditional clothes that she hand-embroiders.

Innokenty is equally at home in the wild. In honour of his guests, he has killed a reindeer. Its throat has been slit, its pelt peeled, its organs removed and its blood drained into a pan. He has chopped the chilly meat into cubes on the logs outside his tent, ready for tonight's feast.

Innokenty has the slanting cheekbones of his ancestors. But he is also the homogenized product of a thorough Soviet education. His name is Russian, he holds Russian political prizes, and like other herders there is nothing rustic about his eloquent, educated Moscow-speak.

His friend, Even ethnographer Anatoly Alexeyev, has been working for three years with the Yakutsk-based Sakha American Business Centre on a US$630,000 project to set up seven mobile meat-processing plants.

Now, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is help-

Traditionally the Eveny have lived a nomadic way of life that revolved around herding reindeer, their only source of wealth.

ing raise $1.5 million for a separate programme to set up meat-processing mini-factories and show the Eveny how to market their products internationally. Bill Dickins, a UNDP special adviser in Moscow, believes the effort could be self-sustaining in three years. "They'll have a source of income and livelihood," he said.

Getting past projects off the ground has proved difficult; Alexeyev's work with the American Business Centre has not yet borne fruit. And even after start-up money comes, new projects face severe transport problems. The 20-odd state helicopters that used to service the remote north in Soviet days, transporting people and products to town from the wilds at no cost to the herder, have been sold off or privatized. Hiring a private helicopter now costs an unthinkable $1,000 an hour. "If our meat has to go out by helicopter now, it will cost as much as gold!" Alexeyev laughed.

Many of the kids in the claustrophobic, cashed-starved village of Sebyan-Kyuyel' talk longingly of a future in the big city, Yakutsk. But a limited revival of Even culture in the village (the local language is now taught right through school, alongside Russian and the regional language, Yakut) is encouraging some children to think of a future with the herds.

"I'm sorry I'm back," said 13-year-old Anna, referring to life in Sebyan-Kyuyel'. Like many village children, Anna spent her summer learning her traditions in a reindeer camp. "It's boring here in town, but up there everything is so interesting."

—Vanora Bennett, Moscow-based correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, *USA*

A magnificent moon lights up the Siberian sky; night has just fallen, but it is already icy cold. Around a big bonfire, the two families who populate this remote mountain settlement begin to dance, hand in hand. It is a slow, almost sombre round, chanted in husky cries; a round that comes from the depths of the Tungus memory, from a time when the Eveny —and their cousins the Evenki— were the only "children of the taiga." All nomads. Hunters, fishermen, but, above all, reindeer herders.

The round has stopped. Seated on the lichen-covered earth, a man recites one of the thousand ancestral legends of the Even people. Dazzled, a swaddled babe in his mother's arms watches the dancing flames. Later, he will slowly close his eyes to the sounds of a lullaby: "My little one, stay in good health. Be strong, take the measure of your land, go out and hunt in freedom, go out and breed your reindeer." A lament already filled with nostalgia.

Will he one day follow the reindeer searching for whatever meagre food they can forage, this child asleep under the tent? Will he hunt the stag all night (his cheekbones gnawed by frost, his feet in snowshoes), or the hunter's prize, the polar bear? Will he kneel on the ground as a sign of gratitude for the prey that one "obtains" but does not "kill," since the word would insult the animal's soul? Will he trap salmon, during the warmer months, in one of the many rivers that flow into the majestic River Lena?

Unlikely. The mother of this baby is called Njurguyana. She is 22 years old and for her son she dreams of a life that is less harsh—far from these Verkhoyansk Mountains, which the Arctic Circle cuts across and brings an icy wind as early as mid-September. When he is a teenager he might like to come back here, to Sakhandzha, or to other encampments and, during the vacation, gorge himself on wild berries in a bowl of cream. But will he even know how to milk the animals? In losing a nomad, the Eveny will have lost one of their own.

Since the beginning of time—but for how much longer?—the reindeer have been the *raison d'être* of the Eveny. "Breeding reindeer is our only occupation," says Innokenty Burtsev. "Without it we would become extinct, like the mammoths," whose bones are discovered from time to time when the Siberian permafrost, the *merzlota*, thaws out. More than a trade, reindeer breeding guarantees the collective identity of the Eveny—preserves their language, their memory, their traditions. Nomadism is their ultimate guarantee of survival as a people.

And so this condemned nation is clinging to its way of life with energy and dignity. Aware that they are on the brink of disaster, the Eveny,

ON SHIFTING GROUND

RUSSIA

From March to October, the Eveny follow the reindeer.

in dwindling numbers, continue their endless roaming between taiga, mountain and tundra because, for a nomad, all untrodden land becomes dead land. They are claiming the right to preserve what writer Bruce Chatwin, speaking of shepherds, called "the space in which they can be poor, if such is their desire." —*Jean-Pierre Langellier, editorialist* for Le Monde, *Paris, France*

"It's just so far away. And to tell you the truth, we don't know anything about reindeer," said one Central European diplomat at a UNDP-sponsored "donor conference" last September. The conference took place in Moscow, some 6,000 kilometres away from the pristine coniferous forests that the Eveny inhabit. And making a case for preserving the traditional lifestyle of the reindeer herders wasn't easy.

"It's too remote for us," another from Scandinavia commented. "We are concentrating our aid on the European part of Russia."

Some embassies did not even bother to send a representative.

For those who did come, the organizers showed a video about the area in question, the Sakha Republic. But even that did not go down well.

"I think these Sakha people should hire some public relations consultants. I don't think we want to see furry animals killed in traps, or wolves shot from helicopters," another diplomat said.

Meanwhile in the Siberian taiga, the Eveny continue to sleep in tents in freezing temperatures and eat berries and reindeer meat, quite ignorant of Western worries about political correctness. Wolves kill reindeer, the Eveny's only source of livelihood, and they will shoot a wolf on sight. They will also shoot a bear, because if they don't, the bear will kill them.

The reindeer herders want to live in the way they know and love. But they also want to survive in a changing world that requires meat to be packed in vacuum-sealed plastic.

Most Europeans or Americans will probably never understand life in the vast expanses of the Siberian taiga. And maybe they don't need to. But whatever interest the donor conference manages to generate will lighten the burden that life can become when it revolves around raw survival.—*Kalle Koponen, Moscow-based bureau chief for* Helsingin Sanomat, *Helsinki, Finland*

Yakutsk in September. A swift thrust with the knife into the neck, a second into the heart. The reindeer collapses. Quickly, the Even herdsman closes the wound in the neck with a wooden plug, so that the blood is not lost. He twists the left foreleg about the antlers and waits until sight finally fades from the animal's eyes. Innokenty Burtsev has slaughtered the reindeer according to strict Even custom. Cutting skillfully, he "liberates" the dead animal from its hide.

Only in exceptional cases, such as the visit of foreign guests, or when the hunt for elk, mountain sheep or wild reindeer has been unsuccessful, do the Eveny resort to slaughtering animals from their own herds. The reindeer are their only modest wealth. Meat, hide, antlers, tendons, intestines, blood—everything has a use and forms the foundation of life for the Eveny, and for other indigenous people of the Siberian taiga. Their number in the Sakha Republic, also known as Yakutia, is estimated at 21,000. Aside from the Even people, the Tungus, Tchukchen and the Yukagirs also live in an area six times the size of Spain. Most of them live in small villages and settlements; however, 7,500, like the group in which Innokenty Burtsev travels, have a nomadic or semi-nomadic life.

From March to October, the group—a mere dozen families—follows the reindeer. Every ten days they move on, so that the fragile lichen, the reindeer's basic food, can regenerate itself. During this time, primitive linen tents, set up over the crudely trimmed trunks of young trees and held together with belts, become their homes.

Innokenty Burtsev may still call himself a brigadier—a term left over from Soviet times—since the herd once belonged to the *sovkhos*, or state farms. The former sovchos have today become the State Uniform Product Company, which owns a

60 per cent share of the herd. The remaining 40 per cent is owned privately by the breeders. But the new ownership arrangement has not made life any easier. On the contrary, the upheavals in the former Soviet Union have reached the remote Sakha. Lack of money, collapsed economic relationships and unemployment have meanwhile become unpleasant realities here too.

The populations of Northern Russia have been hit hardest—as they have been since colonization by Russian Cossacks some 300 years ago. The conquerors brutally "converted" the Yakuts, the Eveny, the Tungus and Yukagirs to the Russian Orthodox religion and forced Russian names on them. Under Czarina Catherine II, the Russians began sending vodka to people in these remote areas to persuade them to convert. However, the shamanism of the northern nations proved to be exceptionally tenacious. In the 1930s, Stalin's Central Committee felt that socialism was threatened by the region's medicine men and ordered them to be rooted out. Four shamans are still living in Sakha, which used to be one of the most feared places of exile during Stalin's rule.

After World War II, other aspects of the Soviet lifestyle began to encroach upon the northern peoples. The children of the indigenous were placed in boarding schools, sometimes forcibly. At the same time, Moscow extended social and medical services. Subsidies were plentiful. For many Eveny, it was one of the better times in their history.

But the funds that once came from Moscow have dried up. Most of the reindeer breeders have not seen a paycheck since March. There are hardly any customers for reindeer meat anymore because transportation costs have escalated so dramatically. And, according to one UNDP study, "cultural, domestic, national, medical, trade and transportation services have been destroyed."

The UN organization is trying to improve the situation of the Eveny by teaching the reindeer breeders to think in terms of a free market and making a profit. They believe that raising reindeer—beyond satisfying a traditional way of life—can also be profitable.

Valentin Ejodorow, the prime minister of the Sakha Republic, believes such a balance might be possible.

There are people in Sakha who want to "close down" the North because it is unprofitable. "I am against this. People have lived here long before we did and will make their homes here long after we are gone."

—Manfred Quiring, correspondent for Berliner Zeitung, *Berlin, Germany*

Not everybody sees a future for the Eveny in reindeer herding. "I think the Eveny will abandon their way of life someday," said Vitaly Artamanov, the Sakha Republic's minister of foreign relations. "It's unproductive."

Even among the herders themselves, there is little romantic sentiment for a way of life that precludes almost all the comforts and diversions of civilization.

Gosha Krevoshapkin, for one, is attracted to the lifestyle depicted in the Hollywood movies he watches when visiting Selwan-Kyuyel', the nearest Even settlement.

"I'd go to Hollywood too if I had the chance," he said. "Tell Arnold Schwarzenegger if you see him that there is a reindeer herder out here who wants to be in one of his movies."

Anatoly Alexeyev, a professor of ethnography at Yakutsk State University, feels there is a conflict between civilization and life on the taiga. Although Eveny by birth and upbringing, he has assimilated into the world of Russian academia.

"I am a destroyer of my own culture, because I live in two worlds," he said. "A half-naked Indian in the Amazon who has never seen civilization is better than I am because he lives in harmony with the world he was born into."

But among the Eveny, he is one of the most strident advocates of development that would, ideally, give his people the advantages of civilization while allowing them to remain in the wilderness.

"Do we need television?" he asked rhetorically. "Yes. Do we need satellite phones? Yes." *—Brian Humphreys, Moscow-based freelance journalist and frequent contributor to the* San Francisco Chronicle, *USA*

Top: A transit camp for demobilized soldiers in Lumege. Bottom: Former fighters wait for their names to be called to leave the camp.

Photographs by Antonin Kratochvil

ON SHIFTING GROUND
ANGOLA

On a remote airstrip deep in the Angolan interior, former rebels wait in the mid-day sun to board a United Nations plane that is supposed to return them to civilian life after 22 years of on-again, off-again civil war. This should be the final stage of rebel demobilization—the cornerstone of Angola's attenuated peace process. But in Angola, few things are ever as they appear.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the commander in charge of the UN Observer Mission in Angola have all expressed concern that the erstwhile rebel group, UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola), has been forcing the soldiers to change their destinations. They fear that instead of going home, the men are being diverted to areas where UNITA can maintain control over them and their families, and to where they can be ordered to fight again if need be.

But forcing the men to resume fighting is not going to be an easy task. What impressed me most while talking to former rebel soldiers and officers was how truly tired they were of war and life in the bush and how badly they desired to return to a peaceful existence.

A few minutes before they queued on the hot Tarmac in Luena, some 800 kilometres east of the capital Luanda, Major Vasco Alfonso and Corporal Alberto Correia sat in the IOM transit centre and shook their heads emphatically. "No. No. No," they said in union; they were not going to go back to fight again—no matter what the politicians decided.

"Since 1975 we have been in this," said Major Alfonso, who was waiting with his family and former comrades for a plane ride to Cazombo, near Angola's border with Zambia. "It's enough. Even if [UNITA leader Jonas] Savimbi orders us to fight again we would not go back. We are tired of war." Corporal Correia and other soldiers nodded in agreement.

Younger men have sometimes been prepared to fight again, but Major Alfonso and Corporal Correia said they advised them it was wrong. "We tell them war is not an option. It only destroys," the major said. Some of the former soldiers said that they were hoping to participate in programmes, many run by UNDP, to help them reintegrate into society, find new skills, earn a living and rediscover lives as civilians. It was these soldiers' attitudes that hold out the greatest hope that war in Angola might truly be a horror of the past.

—Robert Block, Johannesburg-based bureau chief for the Wall Street Journal, *USA*

Victorino Ecupa gently massages and shapes an off-white chunk of plaster like a sculptor creating a masterpiece. But Ecupa's creation is not bound for a museum or art shop. It will become the upper section of an artificial leg for one of Angola's thousands of landmine victims.

"I enjoy doing this because I know I am helping these people have some kind of future for themselves," said Ecupa, 33. He is intimately aware of the pain and uncertainty confronting landmine victims. From the thigh down on his right side, Ecupa, a former sergeant in the Angolan Armed Forces, wears an artificial leg—the result of an anti-personnel landmine he stepped on during fighting with UNITA rebels in 1985.

Relief organizations estimate that as many as 20 million mines are still scattered around the country as a result of nearly 20 years of civil war that ended in 1994. That makes Angola one of the most heavily mined places on earth. The International Red Cross estimates there are about 32,000 amputees in the country, which has a population of 12 million.

Ecupa works at the Bomba Alta clinic—Angola's largest orthopaedic centre—outside the central highlands city of Huambo. Between 50 and 100 people are fitted for artificial limbs at Bomba Alta each month, and about 300 are said to be on the waiting list.

In the capital, Luanda, hundreds of limbless former Angolan Army soldiers beg on streets and intersections for money or food. In the countryside, maimed men, women and children can be found in almost every marketplace. Most tell a similar story of stepping on a landmine while gathering firewood or working in the fields. Child victims were usually playing, some in the schoolyard.

Despite the bleak outlook, there are efforts like those at Bomba Alta to improve the lot of the thousands who suffer from landmine injuries. At the National Institute of Professional Rehabilitation outside Luanda, the Angolan government and a group of international organizations support a project to teach new skills, mainly to soldiers who have been maimed by the war.

The men and women are taught how to sew, make shoes or do carpentry. Domingos Sampio was a government soldier who lost his right arm in a battle with UNITA.

Like other students, he sits in a dimly lit room learning to use a sewing machine. Like many of the others he hopes one day to open a small business in the city.

They fear that instead of going home, the men are being diverted to areas where UNITA can maintain control, and where they can be ordered to fight again if need be.

While focusing on rehabilitating landmine victims, many aid organizations are also working on clearing the mines. Huambo's airport has about 20,000 anti-personnel landmines planted around its perimeter, says Patrice Frejou, an officer in the French Army working with the United Nations to clear mines in the area.

Frejou helps to supervise two teams of 50 Angolans helping to demine the field. It is slow, tedious work, with each man clearing just five square metres a day.

But Frejou and others say the key to demining Angola is creating expertise among its own people. Nielsen Enemark, the programme director for demining activities for the UN Office for Project Services says there now are 560 Angolans and 1,000 foreigners involved in demining operations. "By 1998 we want to have 1,500 Angolans demining.

—John Fleming, Luanda-based correspondent for Reuters, UK

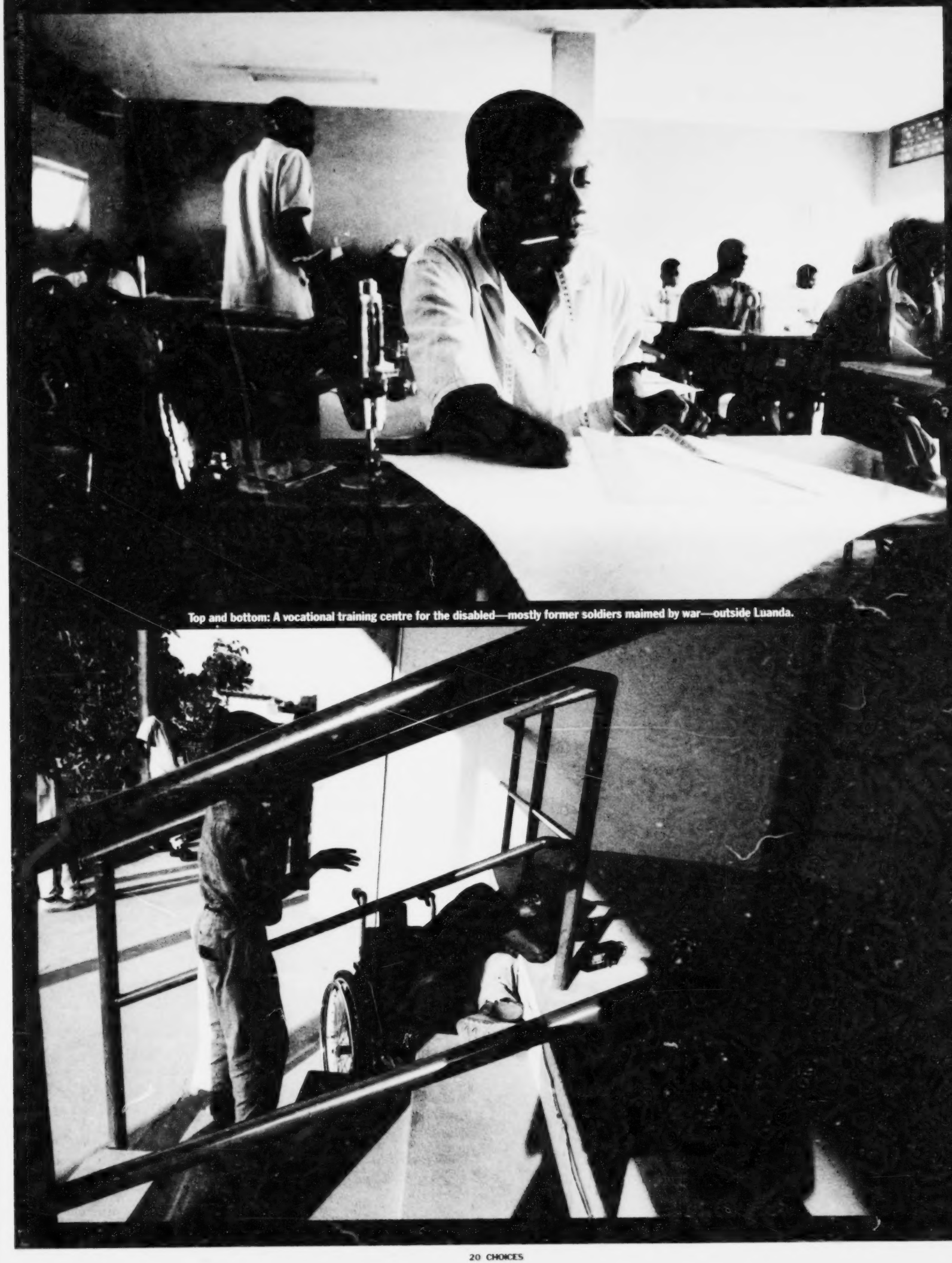
The propeller airplane lands on the dusty runway in Lumege in Angola's Moxico province. UNITA's General Alleluya sits in a white Land Rover and watches who gets off the plane. The general has been "demobilized" and is a civilian according to UN statistics. But he is still running Lumege with military discipline. The general controls more than 80 per cent of Moxico province. Nearly three-quarters of the country in fact is still controlled by Angolan rebels.

An energetic French development worker leads our small delegation of visitors into UN cars and rushes to a tent camp a few hundred metres away.

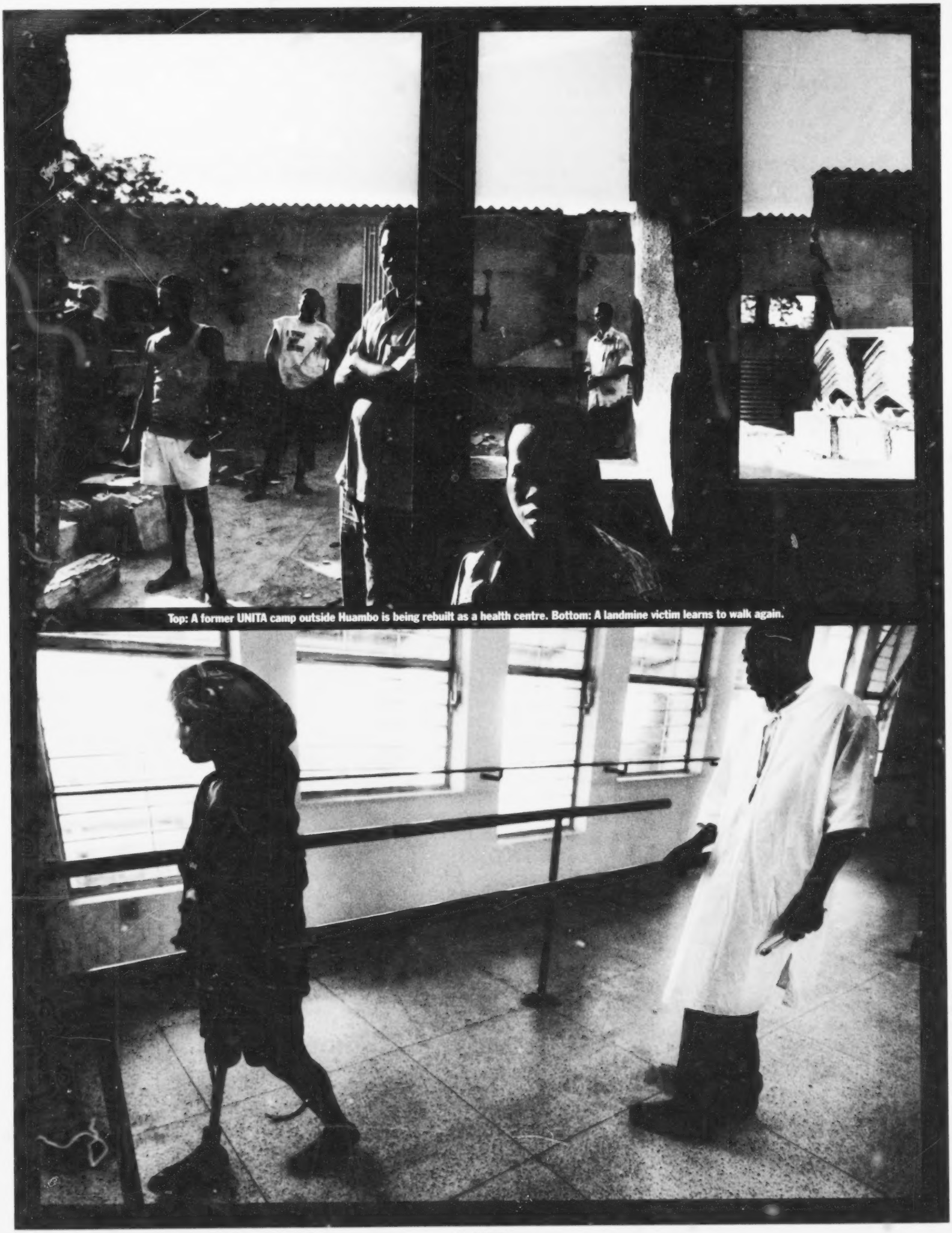
"General Alleluya wants to know who you are," he says. "Don't take any pictures before we have received permission from UNITA."

One of the 15 residential camps set up by the UN for the 90,000 UNITA soldiers destined for demobilization and reintegration is located in Lumege. They were set up in compliance with the Lusaka Protocol, the peace agreement that UNITA signed with the governing party on 20 November 1994.

Continued on page 22



Top and bottom: A vocational training centre for the disabled—mostly former soldiers maimed by war—outside Luanda.



Top: A former UNITA camp outside Huambo is being rebuilt as a health centre. Bottom: A landmine victim learns to walk again.

ON SHIFTING GROUND ANGOLA

Continued from page 19

According to the agreement, all UNITA-controlled areas are to be transferred to the hands of the government. But the process is slow. Some of the soldiers are not registered in the UN camps, and about 20,000 of those who are registered and demobilized have fled.

Two civilian UNITA officers enter the tent and want us to write on a piece of paper our names, where we come from and the purpose of our visit. They are Alleluya's liaison officers.

We get permission to visit the residential camp located a few minutes on a bumpy road away from the small group of houses, church and school that constitutes Lumege. The camp is one of three that are still inhabited. The rest have been emptied.

About 70,000 UNITA soldiers have been through the UN's demobilization apparatus. The soldiers and their families have been able to pick their own destinations when they are returned to civilian life. Most of them chose their home provinces, but many changed their minds just before departure and headed back to the areas where their UNITA unit is located. The need for protection is stronger than homesickness.

Today, 108 new UNITA soldiers and 200 family members are supposed to leave camp. A group of them have been waiting for several hours by the exit, where they are being called up one-by-one. The bag with their belongings is thrown up on the bed of a truck. Panic is about to break out when they load themselves onto the trucks. Mothers with their babies swaddled on their backs are afraid that they will not make it on board.

They have been living in the camps for an entire year. According to the agreement they should have only spent a few months there, but it was only in March this year that the number of soldiers being sent home accelerated.

They have all been through an obstacle course of bureaucratic checkpoints: two medical check-ups, confirmation from the new common government army, registering with the International Organization for Migration, which is responsible for transporting the refugees to their destinations. This is where the soldiers are given their certificate of demobilization.

They have received a cash grant of about $70 to start their new civilian lives, as well as a supply package from the UN: pots and pans, tools, nails, rugs, a few pieces of clothing and a pair of shoes, as well as a somewhat less useful bag from a Belgian aid organization containing a T-shirt, a deck of cards, cigarettes, a lighter and a small radio.

Maria Angene, 23, and Domingos Bartholomeo, 26, have secured a place for themselves on the truck that is taking them to Luena, where they will be flown to a new life in Cazombo. That's where the small family of five will start farming, they say, their eyes beaming from underneath the canvas. Bartholomeo has been fighting in the war for 11 years; Angene cooked for the soldiers.

Many of the demobilized soldiers are 15 or 16 years old. They began fighting at 10 or 12. They have no other skills. Angene and Bartholomeo are among those who want to get away from generals grasping onto power, and who want to cultivate Angola's fertile land.

—Ane Lunde, correspondent for Norsk Telegrambyraa, *Oslo, Norway*

The invisible traps thwart peace in Angola. In Huambo, minefields protecting the airport are ten kilometres long: three parallel lines of hidden bombs—a murderous net.

After a recent international conference in Oslo, about 100 countries agreed on a global ban of landmines: the diplomatic front line.

In the red dust of Huambo, deminers prick up their ears to the beep of metal detectors, delicately put iron sticks into the ground, carry out mines, make them explode (10 to 15 a day). Around them, you can see re-education centres, where plastic is transformed into prostheses. Here, physiotherapists make mechanical legs walk, and wounded people—like the boy who lost his leg but insists on taking his usual path to the well to collect water—show stubborn vitality.

One UN official says: "Don't ask how many landmines there are in Angola. Ask how many areas are mined. No matter whether a field hides 10 or 1,000 landmines, that field is unusable for agriculture. It's dead land."

—Marco Del Corona, foreign news reporter for Corriere della Sera, *Milan, Italy*

Relief organizations estimate that as many as 20 million mines are still scattered around the country. That makes Angola one of the most heavily mined places on earth.

One of the main casualties of Angola's long and bloody civil war has been the country's education system. Many men in their twenties and thirties have learned little—other than how to fight. Now that a tentative peace is holding, there is a growing clamour for schooling and a corresponding demand for trained teachers—especially in rural areas.

Down a badly rutted road several kilometres outside the centre of Huambo lies the Quissala Teacher Training College. Its students—destined one day to work in rural primary schools—stand in the sun in two neat rows, awaiting a group of visitors. Dressed in white shirts and dark blue trousers, they sing of a brighter future for Angola.

The facility, built largely from salvaged materials from war-damaged structures, is operated by a private humanitarian group known as Development Aid People-to-People. It was funded in part by UNDP under its community rehabilitation programme.

The school is well equipped and astonishingly clean. There is even a computer room. Giea Eekman, the Dutch director of the school, concedes such sophisticated technology is of questionable practicality for use in rural areas at the present time. But she says it is essential at the college because of the absence of printed study materials.

In an adjacent classroom, two of the school's 64 students practise the guitar. They will spend one and a half years at Quissala, then another year as interns in the countryside. They will play an integral part in the country's rural renewal, and they accept that responsibility. Francesco Julio, 21, is from Luanda, the capital, but says he looks forward to village life.

"Because of the war, rural areas were destroyed, and the people there have no help in rebuilding. And there's no one to educate them. That's the role we want to play."

—Alex Belida, Johannesburg-based bureau chief for Voice of America, USA ■

Top: Rebuilding a war-torn village outside Huambo. Bottom: Demining outside Huambo airport.

NOTEBOOK

FUNDAMENTALS OF GOVERNANCE

Although UNDP has declared poverty eradication to be its "highest priority," recent figures reveal that the highest proportion of the organization's resources —39 per cent—is now going toward assistance for "governance."

UNDP's growing involvement in governance does not, however, constitute a shift away from the organization's stated priorities. It is directed at their underpinnings. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently pointed out, it is systems of governance that "give societies a structure for social and economic development."

While the term is frustratingly vague and elusive, the issues that it is meant to address are not. These include the effective and reasonably fair management of a society, and the ability of that society to, for example, raise revenues, plan and build infrastructure, and provide for the security of its people. From a Western perspective, these goals ideally are accomplished through a framework built around multi-party elections, an independent judiciary and accountable legal systems.

The changing political landscape makes the need for assistance with such fundamentals especially urgent. And, having received requests from many countries and having responded, UNDP officials realized that they had already established a de facto concentration in governance. Which has now become an official priority.

As James Gustave Speth, UNDP's Administrator said at a global conference on Governance for Sustainable Growth and Equity last July in New York, UNDP has "become a good governance institution because of the demand."

The conference itself—with attendance by over 1,000 persons, including mayors, parliamentarians and representatives of civil society—attests to an unprecedented willingness to confront such sensitive issues openly and demonstrates the viability of UNDP, with its policy of political neutrality, as a forum.

As a result, however, the organization is now at the centre of what are some of the world's fiercest conflicts. And its most subtle and complex. With the cold war over, the black-and-white distinctions between capitalism and communism are gone. The world is confronted with variations on political systems—and with the need to sort out definitions.

The definition of "governance" itself was the subject of controversy—and some humour—at the UNDP conference.

Barry Jones, a member of parliament from Australia, for instance, called the term "out and out jargon." A delegate from Egypt, he said, had informed him that there was "no Arabic equivalent for 'governance.'" To which he replied: "There is no English equivalent either."

"It's a bureaucratic word that devalues democracy," Jones continued. "It doesn't even take a verb." And, he said, it goes too far in lumping together issues that would best be analyzed separately. "If you take the judiciary, the military, local, regional and national issues and NGOs and put them all in a pot and keep stirring the soup, it gets you nowhere."

"Good governance" is equally elusive—if not more so. Besides the semantic problems, there are notable cultural differences and simply differences of opinion. In UNDP's view, good governance at least requires interaction among different sectors of society—namely, government, private businesses and civil society—and aspires to democratic ideals.

Western democracies however, are not necessarily viewed as doing everything right. In some societies, predictability and control are preferred, and social cohesion and economic growth rank higher than transparency and accountability. The differences can be stark. David Whaley, UNDP's resident representative in South Africa said, after the conference: "In some countries I have served, human rights and decentralization are seen as a threat. In South Africa they are seen as the very basis for reconciliation and nation building."

The process of accommodating to transition may also evoke complicated reactions. Miguel Angel Martinez, a parliamentarian from Spain, explained that after many years of totalitarian rule citizens are likely to be sceptical about democracy and reluctant to organize themselves. Such was the case in his own country, he said, reminding the audience that Spain has been democratic for only 20 years. People tend to have a paradoxical perception of the state, he said. They may reject it and be distrustful of it, but nevertheless expect it to solve all of their problems.

And there is increasing resistance to established recipes. K.Y. Amoako, executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, for instance, spoke about the need to establish "institutions and systems that are home grown, not received."

Mayors from 70 countries found more similarities than differences in confronting the problems of cities. From left to right: Mayor Christopher R. M. Iga of Kampala, Uganda; Governor Jaime Lerner, former mayor of Curitiba, Brazil; Mayor Willie Brown of San Francisco, USA; Mayor Norman Rice of Seattle, USA; and Mayor Rita Bahaguna Joshi of Allahabad, India.

"Some advise the discipline of East Asia and some cite examples from Latin America," he said. But in Africa, there are "unique country-by-country challenges" that must be met. And in many cases, he explained, government reform can only take place after a successful effort at peace building, since the countries in question are facing a situation in which "government and civil society are in ruins after decades of conflict."

A representative from Pakistan explained that a reform programme in his country in the 1970s had begun with great reliance on privatization, but there were difficulties in "moving too fast." If reforms create instability, he said, "the process comes to a halt or slows down." The essential problem, they found, was that they were trying to move ahead "without home-grown reforms." And "every country must come to good governance in its own way."

Shifting more of the powers of government from central to local sources—"decentralization"—is, however, one approach that has broad appeal because it brings local people closer to sources of authority and allows them to realize their potential as participants in decision-making, which in turn can lead to more effective management of resources.

But although it has the ring of reasonableness, decentralization is not universally accepted as a strategy for more effective governance. An August 1997 report in the *Economist* pointed out that Britain's cities are booming once again, no thanks to local governments or directly elected mayors. "It should not be forgotten," the article said, "that much of the centralization under the Tories was a direct response to the failures of local government in the post-war years.... Much of Britain's current urban revival, in fact, has been financed by central government."

And, in an abrupt and controversial decision in the United States at about the same time, "home rule" in the nation's capital, Washington, DC, was declared a failure. Most of the mayor's responsibilities have been transferred to a control board created by Congress.

Elsewhere, however, local government seems to be thriving. "Mayors have become Latin America's movers and shakers," reported the *Wall Street Journal* last summer. "The spread of democracy, the stabilization policies that have brought order to economic life and a growing acceptance of decentralized spending have given them more resources, more political power and greater stature than ever before. The best of them are trying to make government work for the people."

A hunger among the citizenry for participation, once recognized and harnessed, is key to making decentralization work. Keshub Varma, a city official from Ahmedabad, India, for instance, spoke about taking the necessary first step of "getting municipal government to be taken seriously" in a place where "people were throwing tax bills in the waste basket."

Varma explained that after confronting the local "mafia" and vested interests, the municipal government was able to vault the city from being considered hopeless to having "an A+ credit rating." This was accomplished by the creation of public-private partnerships, especially in areas where the urban poor live, and where, in Varma's words "the extent of poverty has to be seen to be believed." The urban poor were asked to pay 33 per cent of the total cost of basic services, while the private sector and the government picked up another 33 per cent each. To the surprise of some, the urban poor delivered, often paying in advance. They were even willing to approve rate increases.

Despite suspicion of the motives involved in privatization, and the consequences, there are urgent needs that are currently being met in this way in many countries. From Varma's point of view, "cities cannot exist without partnerships."

Cities are the arenas in which issues of governance are most complex, where representation necessarily replaces direct democracy. And the participation of over 140 mayors in UNDP's conference on governance is evidence of the centrality of the issue. That does not mean, however, that the issues are in any way resolved.

Cities, which are moving ahead of nation-states in terms of global prominence and the concentration of economic power, are now central to our world. The concentration of wealth is made obvious in cities, as are the disparities of poverty. And the prominence of corporate entities, the presence or absence of insults to the environment, are on display.

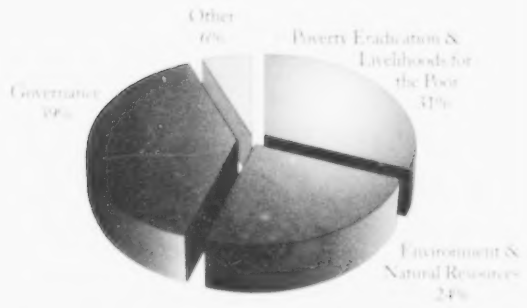
Yet globalization and advances in technology have made many of the most powerful forces that affect our lives seem to be beyond our control. Anything that can give people some sense of control over their own destiny is more important than ever.

Whatever term is used—governance or something else—the deliberate and responsible management of social, economic and political aspects of individual societies is at the forefront of contemporary global challenges. ■

—Ellen Posner

In Africa alone, UNDP has provided election assistance to 30 countries, including Mozambique (above).

Distribution of UNDP's Resources*



*Excludes Programme country cash contributions and cost-sharing contributions

RAISING A PLATFORM FOR AFRICA

Less than two weeks after US President Bill Clinton named him Special Envoy to Africa, long-time civil rights advocate Jesse Jackson greeted a cheering crowd of 200 business leaders, government officials and others gathered in Los Angeles. The purpose of the October meeting: to find ways of building bridges between Africans and African-Americans, especially through business and commerce.

The Reverend Jackson, 56, twice a candidate for the US Democratic presidential nomination, had surprised the group with an unscheduled appearance. But he wanted to lend his clout to a new attempt to push African issues to the top of the US political agenda and to explain why the two need each other.

"There is a parallel between the experience of Africans and African-Americans in this country," said Jackson, a leader of America's movement to stamp out apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s. "Our power must mean something for Africa, and Africa's power must mean something for us. We are Africa's biggest ally in the world."

The Los Angeles event was the latest in a series of "town hall" meetings

launched by UNDP and the Washington-based advocacy group, Constituency for Africa (CFA). Since February 1997, meetings have been held in seven US cities, hosted by members of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, the Congressional Black Caucus or local mayors. They have drawn local audiences of up to 500 people as well as high-ranking African diplomats as speakers.

"Few people in America know about trade and investment opportunities in Africa," said Melvin Foote, CFA's executive director. "The mass media tends to depict Africa as one disaster after the next," he added. "Meetings like this one in Los Angeles help set the record straight. They show investors and others that Africa is anything but a lost continent."

In a town hall gathering in Denver last June, Edith Ssempala, ambassador of Uganda to the United States, commented that the meetings offer a platform to African diplomats seeking to reach the American heartland. "African countries operating with limited budgets find that communicating ideas to the American people can be a real challenge."

Future town hall meetings are scheduled for Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio; Atlanta, Georgia; and Louisville, Kentucky. For more information, contact Melvin Foote at CFA in Washington, DC, tel: (202) 371-0588, fax: (202) 371-9017, e-mail: mfoote@CFAnet.org; or Cassandra Waldon at UNDP in New York, tel: (212) 906-6499, fax: (212) 906-5364, e-mail: cassandra.waldon@undp.org ■

—Cassandra Waldon

RAGS TO RICHER

Handmade paper from India is destined for foreign markets.

Sanganer, India—The scene: a dusty village near Jaipur, not quite on the tourist map. Fifteen families—spanning several generations—grind discarded cotton rags into a pulp that is spread over intricate grass screens. As the milky substance dries, women in colourful saris shower the trays with rose petals, the finishing touch in creating all-natural paper. The product of their labour will end up in posh boutiques thousands of kilometres away.

To the trend-obsessed denizens of New York and Paris, handmade paper is a welcome antidote to a world of mass-produced goods. To the *Kagzis*, or paper-making families of India, it is a time-honoured craft and a ticket out of poverty.

According to historians, paper-making originated in Samarkand, a city in present-day Uzbekistan. It was carried to India along the Silk Route in the 12th century, and for hundreds of years it flourished there. But when British colonists began flooding Indian markets with milled paper in the 1800s, the craft all but disappeared.

Mahatma Gandhi spearheaded a revival of village-based industries, including paper-making, in the 1920s. Yet even that was not enough to put a permanent end to the deluge of manufactured paper goods that eventually crowded out the handicrafts of local artisans.

As a matter of policy, the Indian government today has renewed its support to cottage industries and, as a result, production of handmade paper has doubled in the last four years. Profits have also soared: the value of exports has risen from US$170,000 to $2.5 million annually.

Part of this support came in 1991, with the establishment of the Kumarappa National Handmade Paper Institute in the town of Sanganer. With the help of UNDP, the institute today has a modern testing laboratory, demonstration plant and trained staff who have helped to develop new paper products, improve quality and promote exports. They have also developed a new breed of entrepreneurs who are opening up paper-making operations in villages across the subcontinent.

The industry's rebirth has not only been a boon to the local economy and many poor families. It has also been a blessing for the environment. The Kagzis usually use discarded rags and wastepaper—not wood—to make the pulp. This means that fewer trees are cut and more waste recycled. Moreover, the production process requires no toxic chemicals for bleaching or finishing.

Several years ago, through a grant from UNDP, a member of one of India's oldest paper-making families travelled to New York to display his wares at an international exhibition. Seeing that the richly textured paper was not only beautiful but ecologically friendly, buyers inundated him with orders. And the Kumarappa Institute helped him satisfy the demand. Today, the company, called Salim's Paper, does business totalling more than $1 million a year and employs about 300 people, over a third of whom are women. It is designing new product lines and finding even more markets in the West. Meanwhile, other Kagzis are being drawn back to the now lucrative trade.

Innovation is bolstering the industry, says S.N. Singh, who runs the institute. He and his staff have identified other non-wood materials that can be made into paper, including banana stems, jute waste and even *bhang* (hemp). Although traditional production methods are a well-guarded secret among the Kagzis, the institute is developing other chemical-free processes.

What the Maharaja of Jaipur used to document all his official work hundreds of years ago is today sold in exclusive stationery shops throughout the industrialized world. Major outlets include Worldpaper in the United States, PopDesign in the UK and Globus in Switzerland. ■

—Ruchira Gupta

Bucharest, Romania—Since 1989 this apartment complex in the neighbourhood of Zabrauti—built as a temporary accommodation for transient workers—has been condemned for demolition: there is no heat, drainage or sewage disposal, electrical installations are dangerous, and an outside tap is the only source of water for more than 300 people. Still, it offers shelter to families like this one—headed by a single mother—with nowhere else to go. As part of a pilot project to combat poverty, UNDP is working with the community and municipal government to renovate the apartments and the surrounding area, provide a kindergarten, food and medicines for young children, and organize credit schemes and vocational training for the 280 residents who are unemployed. Already, a nearby public school has offered to make space for 25 children from the Zabrauti community; fourth graders from the UN International School in New York have donated pencils, crayons and other school supplies. ***—Ioana Emmett***

TALK BACK

READERS RESPOND

Misguided technology

Just a note to tell you how much I liked Kunda Dixit's article, "The Third Wave and the Third World" (July 1997).

It is appalling to me that Mr. Gates and his apostles refuse to acknowledge the elitist nature of technology. Likewise, it is doubtful that they would ever acknowledge that "...the corporate values that drive information technology are the same ones that messed up the earth."

We have confirmed Einstein's fear: We have allowed technology to surpass our humanity.

Martina Newberry, Pomona, California, USA

More foreign investment for Africa

Hearty congratulations on the July issue of CHOICES. My hope is that it will help African nations realize that all is not lost: that they can, in fact, recover and embark on the road to prosperity. This will require democratization, which will engender transparency and accountability, as well as modernization. These two steps would most certainly assure them an entree into the $12 trillion pool of private capital that Marshall Carter confirms is available for investment and economic development. As the article about Mr. Carter points out ["Money Matters to Marshall Carter"], other countries of the South have done it, and even the People's Republic of China has recently taken the giant step of privatizing some of its sacred state cows. The Chinese have seen the light of the new economic age and have every intention of capitalizing on it.

Kenneth Y. Best is a West African newspaper publisher based in the USA

Sailing different oceans

After reading "Money Matters to Marshall Carter" (July 1997), I was hungry and sceptical. Hungry, because I wanted deeper exploration of the vastly different perceptions of North and South about the role of external private investment in developing countries. Sceptical, because the problem goes way beyond differences in perception and far wider than the narrow circle of actors described.

The article notes that private bankers in the North and international donor agencies are like "ships passing in the night"—relatively close but with low visibility. But the gap between most Northern bankers and most planners/programme managers in the countries of the South is like ships sailing different oceans —out of reach and out of sight. For these two sides to start working together takes more than a search for mutual compass alignment and common sea routes; they misunderstand and miss knowing so much about each other that, in political and practical terms, they are half a world away.

Beyond the major perception gaps, the simple fact is that self-interest, financial expectations, professional roles and organizational action agendas differ fundamentally and radically. Perhaps the longest distance in the world is between stockholders and bankers in the richest countries of the planet, at one extreme, and the poorest people and countries, at the other end. Private investment may be on the rise, but it simply never reaches the 1.3 billion poorest slum dwellers and farmers who live on less than $1 a day, especially in the 50 poorest countries, which get less than one per cent of the global private investment.

The worthwhile initiatives by Carter's institute may succeed in getting Northern bankers and veteran development professionals to adjust their outlooks and perhaps even shift their operations, for their mutual benefit. Some managers of banking and investment-type programmes in developing countries will probably do the same. But the article sadly gives little reason to hope that actual investment flows to the developing world will diversify significantly from the 99 per cent that has long gone to the high- and middle-income countries. ■

Paul Boyd, cultural geographer and freelance editor, is a former UNDP official

CHOICES welcomes feedback from readers. Letters for publication should include the writer's name, address and daytime telephone number or fax, and should be addressed to the editor, CHOICES magazine, UNDP Division of Public Affairs, One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017. Fax: (212) 906-5364. E-mail: lois.jensen@undp.org Letters may be edited for reasons of clarity and space.

MATTERS OF FACT

The *Good* News. Today, 60% of the world's governments are democratically elected, as opposed to 40% in 1986.

The average income of people in Viet Nam is only US$200 a year. Yet 93% of all adults are literate and 90% have access to basic health services. › Since 1960, the share of rural families with access to safe water has grown from 10% to 75%.

Singapore has the lowest rate of maternal mortality in the developing world; fewer women die of pregnancy-related causes than women in France, Japan or the USA.

In 1982, more than half of preschool children in Thailand were malnourished. Less than ten years later, moderate and severe malnutrition had been virtually eliminated. › Average life expectancy in Latin America and the Caribbean, at 69 years, is approaching that of the industrialized countries (74.1 years).

The adult literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled since 1970.

In 1970 Oman had only three schools, providing education to 900 boys. In 1994, the country had nearly 500,000 children in school, 49% of whom were girls. › From 1985 to 1995, defence spending in the developing world fell by more than half, when measured as a percentage of gross domestic product. › Since 1990, 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have held their first democratic presidential elections.

The debt burden of 20 of the world's poorest countries could be lifted for the cost of one Stealth bomber.

Information is drawn from the *Human Development Report 1997*, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme. The report is published in English by Oxford University Press (paperback ISBN 0-19-511997-5; hardbound 0-19-511996-7), and in eight other language editions by a variety of publishers.